Plate 11

133

The Kotri River

[346]

Lingo's shrine at Semurgaon

View from the Keakal Ghat

[p. 4 (R)]

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

MURIA RELIGION

The similarity between this description and the account which I have just given of the witch hunt at Palki is very striking. The dead are generally believed to communicate their desires to mankind and to give them instruction about the ordering of their lives. The dead are, of course, specially connected with the clan and its continuity. It is not altogether impossible that out of a cult of the Departed, where in former days the bier was used more than at present for divination and to express the will of the gods, there gradually developed the custom of substituting some symbol for the corpse and at last the 'Anga' for the bier.

This suggestion gets some support from a dream seen by a Bison-horn Maria convict shortly before the fatal quarrel which led to murder and his imprisonment. He dreamt of an Anga, a drum and a village-trumpet. The Anga, he said, stood for the corpse of the murdered man being taken out for burial and the drum and trumpet suggested the funeral. The Anga, he admitted, clearly foreshadowed his terrible deed had he only had the wit to understand it.[1]

It is just possible, of course, that the clan-god takes its name from the land of Anga, a great kingdom—one of the chief sixteen—of ancient India, which has been identified with the present district of Bhagalpur and part of the Santal Parganas. Its boundaries are uncertain and may have also included the districts of Birbhum, Murshidabad and Manbhum.[2] At the time of the *Atharva Veda*, the inhabitants were known as Anga and 'the contemptuous way they were mentioned suggests these were aboriginals'.[3] A connexion between the Muria and Bihar is not impossible and is suggested by many cultural similarities, but I have not found anything resembling the Bastar clan-god in the ethnographic records of Bihar.

V. Muria Temples

Mān to pen nahi to pāthar.—If you believe, it is a god; if not, it is a stone.—Muria saying.

J. D. Unwin defined a temple as a 'roofed building other than a grave-house, in which the power in the universe manifests itself and which is specially erected and maintained in order that a right relation may be preserved with that power, the building being such that a man can stand upright inside it'.[4] On this definition the Muria build temples and are in Unwin's 'deistic stage' of culture—a stage which, according to Unwin, is only achieved by those peoples which forbid pre-nuptial intercourse. The Muria provide a striking exception to Unwin's general theory and throw some light upon it.

In a few Muria villages there are no temples. In Almer there is nothing but a few stone seats under asja trees, where the Village Mother is worshipped and the New Eating ceremonies performed. In Kajen the Village Mother forbade the erection of any shrines. But in most villages there are several buildings that fulfil the above definition of a temple. Sometimes these are scattered about the village, one put in the jungle, another in someone's field, a third actually in the compound of a house. In other villages, as for example in Bayanar and Adner, the shrines are all together in one spot where the divine power manifests itself. In Kabonga, the shrines looked like a little village.

[1] See *Muria Murder and Suicide*, p. 213.
[2] Dey, op. cit., p. 318.
[3] Ibid., p. 344.
[4] J. D. Unwin, *Sex and Culture* (London, 1934), p. 14.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

The buildings vary greatly. Some are solid mud houses with strong doors, others are open sheds, a few stand in substantial compounds of their own with pillars and swings before the entrance. The furniture and symbols inside vary as greatly. In the solid buildings there is generally something that might be damaged by cattle or blown away in a storm—little brass images of horses, elephants and bulls, elaborate litters for Danteshwari, bunches of peacock feathers. Flags and very small images are wrapped up and put into an earthen pot hung from the roof. The long Gutal poles (with a big bunch of peacock feathers at the top) are slung from the roof, and the Anga Deo are hung on ropes from the roof or placed resting on bamboos. Other symbols of the gods are chains, spears, axes, digging tools, whips of cow-hair, shields.

Fig. 24. Brass horse, made by Ghasia, of a type often placed in Muria shrines *Height* 9½"

In the more open sheds, the symbols of the gods have to be slung high up very near the roof. At the foot of the central pillar there is generally a flat stone which serves as the seat of the god, and there are several big stones placed together to form a hearth for the cooking of the new grain and pulses or sacrificial animals. The gods are often taken out of their temples to be worshipped, at least on all major festivals, but the sacramental cooking is done inside. So you may often see big wooden spoons stuck in the roof. Outside the temple, there may be a swing with a spiked seat on which the mediums can prophesy; there is often a row of wooden pillars, each with a stone seat before it, to which certain visiting gods can be tied, and there may be a stone for special offerings to the dead.

On the wooden pillars, there are often phallic symbols. At Metawand I saw an elaborately carved vagina showing the clitoris and labia; there are similar carvings at Markabera and Bayanar.

I will describe one or two representative shrines, for this will give a better idea of them than any general account. At Markabera is the *pen-ravar* of the Wadder clan, and near the temple is a row of menhirs erected for members of the clan who have died in the neighbourhood. But Markabera is not the original *pen-ravar* of this clan. That is at Kakori, where the clan-god, the Anga Bope Harma, has his residence. Many years ago, Bope Harma had a son at Kakori who was named Bhumiriya; two brothers of the Wadder clan lived there as the Dhurwa Pujari. After a time Bope Harma ordered one of the Wadder brothers to go to Markabera and make a new *pen-ravar* there with a temple to Bhumiriya.

The temple is built with nine wooden pillars, fixed in place by the clan-priest who put iron slag at the bottom of each hole. Bundles of grass called *gubba* were prepared by a Karanga, a clan *akoudwa* to the Wadder clan; mahua flowers and water were offered them and they were tied to the top of the pillars before thatching. The roof was then thatched, but no walls were made. Every ten years, the *pen-ravar* building is renewed.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

346 Just inside the gate of the enclosure there is a line of pillars and four stone seats. These poles are for the convenience of such visiting deities as are

[532]

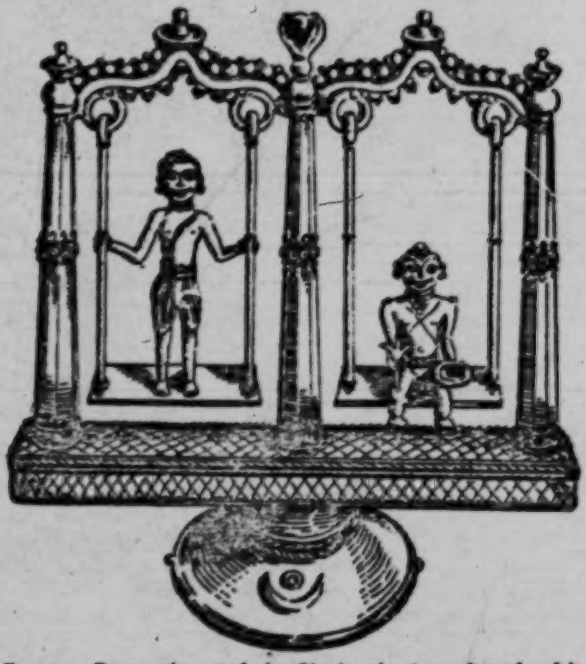

Fig. 25. Brass swing, made by Ghasia, of a type often placed in Muria shrines
Breadth 8½"

represented by poles or flags and can be tied to the pillars; the stones also are seats for those gods who have a traditional or family right to come to the temple. Such are Kustirmago Pen, a cousin of Bhumiriya, an Uika god from Kasabahi; Lath Kuar, Bhumiriya's son, a Wadder god from Tadopal; Inde Muitar, a Karanga god of Suhnar and Son Kuar, son of Kanda Dokara, a Maravi god from Garhbangal. Near the gate of the enclosure is another stone [719] of sacrifice where black hens are offered to the dead. One of the pillars is used to tie the buffaloes and bulls which are to be sacrificed to Bhumiriya.

Entering the temple, we find a clean open shed with broad wooden pillars [831] on which are carved crude representations of the sun and the vagina. Here too are four stone seats. The chief is, of course, for the lord of the temple Bhumiriya himself. The second is for his father Bope Harma who is brought every ten years to sit with his son. The third is for Dhursai Kuar, a son of the Pat Deo in Jagdalpur, who comes at festivals from Timnar, and the fourth is for Lalsai Kuar of Metawand.

From the roof hangs an earthen pot containing little bells and a bundle of peacock feathers. Another pot has in it a piece of cloth used as a flag at festivals. In the roof are ten large wooden spoons, which are used for the

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

346 New Eating ceremonies and made ceremonially every ten years, and a large gourd kept for pouring water. Piled round one of the pillars is a heap of dancing-sticks of dhaman wood called Bhumiriya Kolang; these are kept in the shrine for the Pen Kolang dances and at the end of three years are taken to the village boundary and hung up on a rope across the road. There is a *kakam* hunting-horn, not a brass one, but the real horn of a wild buffalo.

883 This description is not irrelevant to a book on the ghotul. The spoons and
796 gourd are used by the chelik, who have the responsibility for cooking at the festivals. The dancing-sticks are made by the chelik and used for their ceremonial dances. The hunting-horn is sounded by chelik to summon the people for festivals. Every visiting deity means a corresponding visit from the chelik and motiari of its village: Markabera is thus in close touch with several villages—Timnar, Metawand, Kokori, Kasabahi, Tadopal, Garhbangal and Suhnar. The Markabera god visits Metawand and Kokori, and possibly other villages. The visits of the gods with their attendant chelik and motiari, many of them of clans different to the Markabera Wadder clan, play a very important part in bringing boys and girls of these villages into touch with one another.

346 In Markabera there was only one temple. In Bayanar there are eight grouped together round a wooded hill covered with fantastic rocks amid which the little shrines are built. A narrow path leads steeply up the hill to the first shrine standing up sharply on a rocky mound of its own. This shrine is the home of Pandi Dokara Gutal (represented by a pole with a bunch of peacock feathers at the end) and his two sons Mundi Kuar Gutal and Lalit Kuar Gutal. The three poles are slung high up beneath the roof, for the shed is an open one. At the foot of the centre pillar of the hut is a stone seat, with gongs and an iron lamp. This is a Naitami shrine and there are two stone hearths at either end of it, one for the clan-priest of the Naitami and the other for the husbands of women in their menstrual periods and women who have very recently given [831] birth to a child. On one pillar is a carving of the vagina, on another the sun and moon and a crude horse.

By the little path along the hillside are two sets of pillars with flat stones in front of them to support Pandi Dokara at festivals. A little further on is a small temple for Hinglajin Dokari. This goddess is represented by a closed litter, and there is the usual stone and hearth for her worship.

A little way down the hill is a temple of the Sori clan which houses two more Gutal (poles)—Dawdi Dokara and Lalsai Dokara. Going still further down the hill we reach a large rock on which is a fourth shrine which is empty save for a stone representing Mundi Kuar; this is in charge of a Hindu (Kalar) Pujari from Mungwal.

These little temples on the hillside were curiously impressive; old gods of hill and forest seemed very present there. Down the hill in a shed was a bamboo pole and a flag in an earthen pot representing Son Kuar, the son of the Anga Deo at Narayanpur—another Naitami shrine. One of the most interesting things I saw on this visit was in the temple to Son Kuar. Here was a very small earthen pot tied up in dub grass, in which the *jiwa* of a dead priest was dwelling. For a long time even the Pargana Manjhi hesitated to tell me his name, especially in that potentially dangerous spot, but at last I got it—it was Tota Muria.

We went on towards a great grove of mango trees till we came to a closed temple, again of the Naitami, in which was a characteristic Anga Deo, Baiba the mad god, a stone to represent Bangaram consort of Danteshwari, and two other stones for Kotgudin Matal and Dulardei Matal. Here we were in a definitely Hindu atmosphere. There was a large clay elephant for Bangaram,

[Description of temple buildings see pp 196-198, cat 116—Analyst]

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Muria

and in front of the shrine a pile of old clay elephants, bulls and horses. And indeed I was told that the Anga used to live up on the hillside but was offended by the rough Muria habits and moved down to the plain where he

FIG. 26. A typical carved wooden pigeon often found in Muria shrines
Length 9½'

would not be offended by the sight of his worshippers eating beef. Here, in vivid symbol, was the god leading the hillmen down into the plains, from the open free hut to the enclosed house, to a reform of diet and a change of religious custom and the use of ephemeral images made by low-caste Hindu artisans.

There are two other small temples, both open sheds, to visit; both are for the Naitami clan. The first is for Paknabundin Matal, who is represented by a big stone, and the other for Tallur Muttai, the Village Mother, also represented by a stone. These four temples of the plain are not without their charm; set among great trees they look towards the grim rocks of the hills above them. But they have not the hard clear light and freedom of the shrines that brave the rocks and mountain.

VI. THE MURIA PRIESTHOOD

Who are the priests that officiate at these temples? In a sense every Muria is a priest; for the head of each family tends the dead of his house and can make offerings to his personal gods, but there are priestly families of greater or less influence which have performed the worship of the gods for generations.

Notable among these is the priest of the clan-god or Anga, often now called the Pen-Pujari or Pen-Gaita. In the Chota Dongar and Partabpur areas, he is called the Pen-Waddai. He is also known as the Dhurwa, which is the name of a tribe in the south of the State and possibly has associations with the Dhur Gond. This use of a tribal name as a priestly title is paralleled by the use of the word Baiga to denote a village-priest. It suggests that the Dhurwa tribe like the Baiga is regarded by the people as of great antiquity.

Then there is the priest of the *bhum* or earth. The Kaser-Gaita (knife-priest), also known as the Bhum-Gaita or Mati-Gaita (earth-priest), has the duty of offering sacrifices to the earth and keeping the village free of disease. It is he who must go to the fields and clearings when they are prepared and must make offerings at sowing time and harvest.